

PC frontrunner touts message of "compassion"



By Brock Weir

Christine Elliott might be one of the primary frontrunners in the race to be the next leader of Ontario's Progressive Conservatives, but with members signed up and a few weeks to go before they go to the ballot, there is still a lot of work to do to undo the damage of the last Provincial election.

During a campaign stop in Aurora last week, Ms. Elliott said the party has "turned the page" on what happened in 2014, and they've now laid the first brick on their "path to victory."

"I think what we're dealing with now in our party is somewhat of a change of brand," she said. "There is a lot of people who don't even want to listen to what we have to say right now. They turned their ears against us and they don't want to know what we're talking about. What we need to do is bring a new direction and tone to our party so people will come and join us."

Since the race to succeed Tim Hudak started, those vying to replace him have brought in an estimated 80,000 new members to the party, but the PCs need to build a "much broader base" in order to turn this into a victory in the next Provincial election in 2018. To do this, Ms. Elliott says the party needs to go back to the roots of the Progressive Conservative party and tout both the progressive and conservative arms of their brand.

"There are a lot of people who don't vote for us," she said. "A lot of women don't want to vote for us right now. We have a significant gender gap, a lot of young people don't want to vote for us because they think we're the dinosaur party, and a lot of new Canadians don't know our message because they haven't heard what it is to be a true Progressive Conservative."

What that means, she says, is twofold. First, it is to be fiscally responsible. That's their base, she said. The other component of the puzzle that has been lost in the shuffle, she says, is a message of "compassion", in helping people help themselves.

Giving people a hand-up has been a hallmark of Ms. Elliott's campaign, citing her long-standing work in advocacy and education for Ontarians with disabilities.

"We need to help everyone reach their full potential in society [and] that is the message I am trying to bring forward as a Progressive Conservative and that is resonating with people as I have travelled across Ontario since the end of last June. If we keep going on the same old track we have been going in the last three elections, we're not going to win. We need that new tone, that new direction, and that is resonating with a lot of people who voted Liberal the last time; not because they wanted to vote for Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals. They didn't.

"People were very cognizant of the fact they wasted a billion dollars of taxpayer money on cancelled gas plants just to save a couple

of Liberal seats. They were well aware of the Ornge scandal, the e-health scandal, and now the OPP investigations. People were well aware of that, but we didn't give them the credible alternative they were looking for. We frightened people and we have to stop doing that and start talking about things that really matter to people like healthcare, like education.?

PCs ?tend to give those issues away to the Liberals? believing they can't win with those campaign planks, but that needs to change as they are the bread and butter of what people care about, she said. There also needs to be a concerted effort to get everyone on the same page well before an election. Describing herself as a ?fan of what we did in 1994 with the Common Sense Revolution?, having a united plan would avoid any surprises that can come up during a campaign ?that come out of the blue and totally kill any chances? of winning an election.

The Aurora stop was the latest in York Region for Ms. Elliott, having recently rallied with a group of supporters in Richmond Hill. As she has travelled around the region, she told The Auroran that jobs and the economy are uppermost in the minds of residents she has encountered.

?We have gone into Have Not status,? she said. ?We have this enormous debt and deficit and we have got to get our economy under control. First of all, we have got to get our spending under control, pay off the deficit, balance the books and then build the economy so young people can find jobs. I have heard a lot about youth unemployment issues because it is approaching 20 per cent across the province. A lot of parents are concerned about their sons and daughters finding jobs and a lot of young people, of course, are very worried about their future with high levels of student debt and no jobs. That's why we need to win in 2018.?